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ABSTRACT

A total of 108 junior college freshmen participated in a study comparing the effectiveness of small group instruction with individualized instruction in remedial reading programs. Sixty of the subjects were taught in a small group classroom setting (ten students per class), while the remaining subjects received individualized instruction in a laboratory setting. Instructors were asked to emphasize word recognition, vocabulary, and comprehension skills. An analysis of pretest and posttest scores indicated that the teaching of reading comprehension and vocabulary skills was more effective when done in small group sessions than in individualized sessions. (FL)

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A COMPARISON OF SMALL GROUP AND INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION IN JUNIOR COLLEGE REMEDIAL READING PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

A COMPARISON OF SMALL GROUP AND INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION IN JUNIOR COLLEGE REMEDIAL READING PROGRAMS

The purpose of this study was to compare the effectiveness of small group instruction with individualized instruction in junior college remedial reading programs. The 108 Subjects were junior college freshmen reading from 4th through 6th grade levels. Sixty of these Subjects were taught in small group settings and forty-eight were taught on an individualized basis. The analysis of the pre and post test scores indicated that small group sessions were significantly more effective for teaching comprehension and vocabulary skills than individual sessions.

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Background and Purpose

In two separate analyses of the research in college reading programs both Wright (1966) and Fairbanks (1974) concluded that the effect of college reading programs is influenced by a number of factors, and both authors stressed the need for further research into specific characteristics of these programs. In a survey of college reading programs, Olsen and Swiss (1976) found that the individualization of instruction

was an important characteristic of 87 per cent of the reading programs of the colleges surveyed, and that 40 per cent of the two-year colleges considered the individualization of instruction to be the strongest aspect of their reading programs.

However, no empirical evidence is available to substantiate the positive effect of an individualized instructional component in college reading improvement programs. Smith (1975) compared the gains of 75 junior college students enrolled in an individual diagnostic-prescriptive program with a traditional reading improvement program. Both groups made significant gains in reading during the instructional period, but no significant differences were found in favor of the individual diagnostic-prescriptive method. Mahoney (1974) compared a didactic tutorial approach, a facilitative tutorial approach, and a traditional teacher centered approach in college reading and study classes. All three groups made significant progress, but there was no significant difference between the three groups.

The major purpose of this study was to compare the effectiveness of individualized laboratory type instruction with small group instruction in junior college remedial reading programs.

Method

Subjects

The 108 Subjects were chosen from students enrolled in remedial reading courses at two junior colleges in a large metropolitan area. Enrollment in the remedial reading course was mandatory because these students had not met the minimum requirements for entering freshmen English courses. The Subjects' reading abilities ranged from a grade score of 4.0 to 6.0 (total reading) as measured by the reading subtests of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills.

Procedure

Sixty of the 108 total Subjects were randomly chosen to be taught in a small group setting (ten students) and were randomly assigned to one of six classes. The remaining 48 Subjects were taught on an individualized basis in a laboratory setting.

Six instructors, each a certified reading specialist with at least two years of experience teaching reading at the junior college level, participated in the study. Each instructor taught one group of ten students for two fifty-minute periods each week, and in addition, each instructor taught eight individual students for two fifty-minute periods each week. The duration of the study was one semester.

The Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test, Level II, Form X, and the terminal word attack test of the Wisconsin Design for Reading Skill Development, Form A, were given as pretests, and a diagnostic profile chart was prepared for each Subject.

Instructors were asked to emphasize word recognition, vocabulary, and comprehension skills in their teaching, but specific instructional techniques were left to each teacher's discretion. All instructors had easy access to two extensive material collections.

At the end of the semester each Subject was given the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test, Level II Form Y, and the terminal word attack test of the Wisconsin Design for Reading Skill Development, Form B. An informal short-answer questionnaire which attempted to determine students' perceptions and attitudes about the reading course was also completed by each Subject. The six instructors who participated in the study were asked to write a report which described their reactions to the two teaching situations.

Results

One way univariate analyses of covariance were calculated for the word recognition, comprehension, and vocabulary posttest scores with the corresponding pretest score as covariate.

The analysis of covariance for the word recognition tests showed no significant differences between the two treatment groups, $F\ (1, 106) = 1.57$, $p. > .01$. The Mean grade score for the Subjects taught in the small group sessions was 8.78 with a standard deviation of .5958.

The analysis of covariance for the comprehension tests showed a significant difference between the two groups, $F, (1, 106) = 36.83$, $p. > .01$. The Mean grade score for comprehension for the small group Subjects was 9.18 with a standard deviation of .5381, and the Mean grade score for Subjects taught in individual sessions was 8.56 with a standard deviation of .5075.

The analysis of covariance for the vocabulary tests showed a significant difference between the two treatment groups, $F, (1, 106) = 8.20$, $p. > .01$. The Mean grade score for the vocabulary tests for the Subjects taught in small group sessions was 9.2 with a standard deviation of .6587, and the Mean grade score for vocabulary for Subjects taught in individual sessions was 8.83 with a standard deviation of .6644.

Discussion

The major finding of this study was that the teaching of reading comprehension and vocabulary skills

to remedial readers in college was more effective when done in small group sessions than in individual tutoring sessions. This result may be due to the effect of the interaction among class members in the small groups. In the informal analysis of the two teaching situations, the instructors noted that the group sessions seemed to foster longer and more in-depth discussions of the selections being read. In most instances the students in the small group sessions read fewer selections than those in the tutored sessions probably because of the longer discussion times per selections in the groups. Thus the group setting, which appeared to foster comprehension discussions, may have influenced the higher comprehension scores of the Subjects taught in the small group sessions.

It had been expected that individual tutoring sessions would provide a unique opportunity for building a strong affective component into the reading program. The student attitude survey showed generally positive attitudes, but there was little difference between the reactions of the Subjects taught in individual sessions or groups. The presence of an individual tutor was not perceived as especially advantageous by the students. Because most of the Subjects' other college classes were very large classes, the

small group sessions seemed to provide as great an affective component as the individual sessions. In fact, a few tutored students commented that being assigned to an individual tutor made them feel especially deficient. Because these students were required to take remedial reading, the assignment to an individual tutor might have been perceived more negatively than assignment to a class.

Summary

The study found that the teaching of reading comprehension and vocabulary skills to college age remedial readers was more effective when done in small group sessions of ten students than in individual tutoring sessions. These results may suggest that group discussion and interaction are an effective means for improving comprehension and vocabulary skills in junior college remedial reading classes. A completely individualized program may not provide sufficient interaction with others and may impede the teaching of comprehension and vocabulary skills.

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